No. 72

# The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

As he approached her, he was struck again, now that her face was averted, how her figure and her bearing resembled that of his first wife. His sensations were strong and weird.

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MR. SHIELDS seemed to take great pleasure in being nice to Talbot and his wife. They chatted for quite a while in the most agreeable fashion, and without paying any attention to Mrs. Crawford who squirmed uneasily on her chair.

"Let's have it over with," said Talbot in a low tone to the old attorney. "We are anxious to get back home."

It appeared, however, that Mr. Shields was in no hurry to read the will of the late Mr. Crawford.

Occasionally he glanced at the widow through the corners of his eyes Her discomfiture and evident impatience gave him a vast amount of pleasure.

Very slowly and deliberately he walked over to his desk. From one of the drawers he took a large sealed envelope and tapped it.

With his paper knife he slit the envelope open, watching Mrs. Crawford covertly as he did so.

The document which dropped on the desk contained something that would give the woman a shock, and also serve as a punishment for the cruelty toward Lillian. Mr. Shields knew this very well.

"Kindly give me your attention, folk," he said as he unfolded the sheet of paper.

Victor Talbot was standing close to Lillian, who was seated in a chair.

He was obviously nervous. He feared that the will might contain something that would upset his lovely young wife.

Mrs. Crawford sat motionless, her staring eyes fixed on the lawyer.

"It has become my duty to make certain disclosures," the lawyer began in a clear, ringing voice. "According to this document, which is the late Mr. Crawford's last will and testament, the entire estate is

to go to his only daughter Lillian.

"The sum of five thousand dollars is to be paid to his widow, Marian Crawford. And this sum is to be paid to her only if she can prove that she has indeed been a mother to my little girl."

For a moment the room was as silent as the grave. It was Mrs. Crawford who spoke first.

"That will is not legal!" she cried, pale as a sheet. "It can't be."

The old lawyer grinned. And there was just a shade of malice in his grin.

"It is quite legal," he declared. "For I drew it up three days before Mr. Crawford passed away. It is signed by two witnesses as provided by law. You may read it if you wish, my dear Mrs. Crawford."

The latter rose and snatched the document from the attorney's hand.

Her eyes dilated as she realized that she had indeed ceased to be the owner of the magnificent Crawford estate.

But she was not yet ready to give up.

"I'll contest that will!" she snarled, trembling with anger. "It won't hold in court!"

"Oh, yes, it will," Mr. Shields quietly.

"It won't!" she flashed back.

"If you think it won't," came back in that same quiet tone, "all you have to do is to hire an attorney and bring suit to break this will. However, I wish to suggest that you will be wasting a large part of the five thousand dollars you are to get.

"Attorneys' fees are high these days, and you will most likely be compelled to pay the cost of the court in which the case is tried. And I would like to remind you that you are not even legally entitled to the five thousand dollars, for you were never a mother to Lillian."

While this exchange of words was going on between Mr. Shields and Mrs. Crawford, Victor Talbot and his wife remained in awed silence.

Neither of them had the least desire to interfere.

"You are an old crook!" Mrs. Crawford flared up, beside herself with disappointment and anger.

"Thanks for the compliment, my dear lady," the lawyer returned, still imperturbable. "And now that you have given me that title, permit me to remind you that two crooks should never quarrel."

The woman bristled at this.

"Do you mean to insinuate that I am a crook?" she shrieked.

Mr. Shields waved a deprecatory hand.

"I never insinuate, Mrs. Crawford."

"You did—you did, and I'll have you in court for slandering me in the presence of others," was the quick retort "I have two witnesses to prove that you——"

"Wait a minute," the old lawyer interrupted testily. "If Mr. Talbot and his very charming young wife ever face you in court, it will be to prosecute you for forcibly depriving Lillian of her liberty.

"And there is another little matter you seem to have forgotten. When you married the late Mr. Crawford, you were still the wife of another man. I have my own opinion of a woman who does a thing like that."

"What?" Mrs. Crawford resembled an infuriated tigress. "I'll not stand for that!"

Talbot and Lillian were on their feet, but Mr. Shields waved them back.

He made it known that he would brook no interference by a quick sign to Victor.

"You are going to stand for a whole lot more before I get through with you," he went on, facing the woman. "You were still Mrs. Prescott when Mr. Craw-

ford married you. I have the documentary evidence to prove this."

"It is a lie!" she screamed. "My first husband's divorce was granted three days before I married Mr. Crawford."

For the next few moments the old attorney was busily engaged searching the upper left drawer of his desk. He unfolded several papers and laid them on the desk.

"If you will kindly step over here and read these two papers," he said without anger, "you will be convinced that I am right. Your first husband procured his divorce from you exactly one week after you became Mrs. Crawford.

"That made your second marriage illegal. You committed bigamy knowingly, and that is a penitentiary offense in this State. I don't think, however, that you would enjoy spending a year or two in prison."

For a while it seemed that the woman would vault the desk which stood between her and Mr. Shields and attack him.

Her face was ghastly white and her eyes glinted dangerously.

"In the eyes of the law you are still Mrs. Prescott," he went on. "You were never Mrs. Crawford. Now I'll give you one chance to extricate yourself without the matter becoming public. I'll make out a check for the five thousand dollars left to you by the late Mr. Crawford.

"You are to leave the old Crawford mansion within twenty-four hours. I don't care where you go, or what you do. If within the time specified you are not gone, I'll swear out a warrant for your arrest.

"You have had your chance," he continued, his voice rising. "Had you treated Lillian decently, I would

never have mentioned the facts concerning your marriage with Mr. Crawford.

"But you didn't. You treated her shamefully. You did your best to make two young people who were made for one another, utterly miserable. You have gone the limit.

"You went beyond the limit when you called me, an old crook and threatened me. Now your game is up, Mrs. Prescott. You'll either follow my advice, or go to jail. And, please, understand this, I am not a vindictive man. I am dealing more lenient with you than you did with others."

During the old lawyer's lengthy speech, the woman never took her eyes off him. She seemed fascinated—hypnotized into silence.

She no longer showed an inclination to prolong the argument. She was beaten and she knew it.

With her head bowed she waited until Mr. Shields finished writing the check, then snatched it from his outstretched hand, and ran from the office as if pursued by a thousand furies.

"I suppose that will be the last of her," he said as he turned to Victor Talbot and Lillian smilingly. "I am only sorry that I did not have the information about her first marriage sooner. I assure you I would have unmasked her without delay."

As he stepped over to the window, he saw Mrs. Prescott in the act of jumping into a waiting taxi which speedily disappeared.

## Chapter 236

## IN FLORIDA

THE HOME of the Gordons had become a cheerless place indeed since the children and their governess were gone. The master of the house went about, the picture of gloom. It was only when a letter came from the sunny South, written by the gentle hand of Marie Desmond, that he braced up.

Every morning he eagerly read about the doings of society in Miami, Florida.

Occasionally "the Gordon children and their charming governess" were mentioned, and it brought a smile of satisfaction to his handsome face.

Within the last few days Phil had found considerable diversion in reading other news articles of much interest.

He was pleased to read of Victor Talbot's vindication. And he was pleased when he read that Mrs. Crawford had closed up her home and had taken up her residence in Chicago.

But most of the time his mind traveled in the direction where the warm, gentle breezes played among the blossoms and the luxuriant green vegetation in the sunny South.

His thoughts were of his two children and the wonderful woman who was taking care of them.

Every night he went into his library and closed the door.

With a cheerful fire burning in the grate he read over and over again the letters which told him about Harry and Phyllis.

They were improving splendidly in health.

"God bless them, and God bless her," was his oft repeated prayer.

But Philip Gordon was not the only one who offered a daily prayer to the throne of the Almighty One. Marie did that with all the fervency only a mother heart could produce.

There were moments, however, when her entire nature rebelled against the bitter fate which kept her separated from the man she loved so dearly.

It was a horrible thing to keep up this deceit. Philip Gordon was still her husband in the sight of heaven.

And had the world known the true state of affairs, she would again reign as the mistress of Oak Manor instead of the woman who had tricked her so cruelly.

Marie tried to be as happy as she could under these circumstances. Only kind providence could give her the right to reveal herself as Gordon's first wife.

She rejoiced in the children's recovery. She rejoiced at having them in her possession, but even these joys were powerless to allay this feeling which oppressed her, or to drive away the shadow which rested on her spirit.

And there was no one in whom she could confide —no one who could help her. The pain of the longing in her heart was irremediable.

Unless a miracle took place, she must renounce all hope. But such a renunciation, she felt clearer and clearer, meant a life of indescribable misery.

Up in the North there was a lonely man at his own hearth ,a man without joy or love, and for him she longed with untamable desire.

She knew that he was seeking his wife and knew, too, that he would never find her where he sought her.

Why did she not speak out; why did she not cut with her own hand the knot which he could not untie?

Would he not take her to him gladly, when in her he found again the mother of his children?

And even though the future did not promise a brilliant happiness, would they not at least find peace in themselves? Was this not sufficient, could she not live for Phil and the children and be content?

No, no! She demanded more. She, herself, desired to live—desired to taste the joys and pleasures of life after having so long foregone them.

To bear forever all the loneliness and cravings of her heart, that was beyond her strength.

This longing for Phil, this yearning for love and happiness was in hot conflict with her pride, and hitherto pride had always been the conqueror in the struggle.

But how long would pride be triumphant?

Little by little she felt its resistance dwindling, and she cherished a latent hope mingled with fear that pride would be vanquished and the veil in which she had enveloped herself would be drawn away.

It would require but a few words to Oak Manor and she could force a decision which would bring her wondrous bliss or greatest misery. If she could but know what would be the result!

Once a week she wrote to Phil, telling him all about the children.

Her spirit chafed as she wrote her sober, formal letters which must not reflect anything of her own feelings—of her longing for him, in which she must not go beyond the bounds of her position as "governess."

She did not know with what expectancy her letters were looked forward to—how Phil buried himself in their contents.

She did not know with what eagerness he read

and reread them, looking for a warmer expression from her to quench his heart's thirst — and how he laid them aside with a disappointed sigh.

But how could Marie act otherwise? What else could he await from her—his children's tutor and caretaker?

And when he wrote her it was with force that he held back words which would disclose to her his feelings and which would tell her how much he missed her.

And yet, his letters were warmer and heartier than hers.

Marie felt it strongly, and all the hotter flared up the flames of her longing for him when she read his letters, and all the more violent grew the struggle between her longing for him and her pride.

It was a blessing for her that she had the children with her, who, again and again, would draw her out of her mood and divert her.

This time, they had again come to Florida to a resort which had not only been recommended by Dr. Van Buren, but also by a famous specialist in Chicago whom Marie had consulted.

Although she went out with the little ones daily, she consistently avoided, as much as possible, the stream of pleasure-seekers.

She felt easier in seclusion and, morever, she noticed that Harry's excitability was increased by the presence of so many strangers.

For once, however, she had yielded to the pleadings of the children, and was going with them to the park to attend a concert.

To allow the children to rest after a half hour's ramble, she sat down with them on a bench beside the promenade and drive-way which offered a fine view or the ocean.

At the moment, the drive-way was deserted and but few pedestrians were using the promenade.

A smart little pony cart passed by. In delight the children sprang from the bench and followed the pretty vehicle with pleased eyes.

Phyllis had turned to Marie to be taken up again on the bench.

All at once the child uttered a little cry and exclaimed:

"Oh see, Miss Desmond, there comes Mama!"

The bench which Marie had taken was placed somewhat back from the promenade so that neither she nor the children were able to see anwone approaching until they came almost directly before them.

Marie leaned forward and raising her head, she saw, but a few steps distant, two ladies accompanied by two gentlemen approaching.

These had heard Phyllis' exclamation. The two women looked up in surprise. They were Alice and Mrs. Courtney, a girlhood acquaintance of hers.

As soon as the latter had caught sight of the children, she ran to them with a cry of pleasure.

She had seen them during a visit she had made to Alice at Oak Manor and had become very fond of them.

She showed it now for, without concerning herself about Alice and without thinking of the embarrassment this meeting with the governess would cause her, she embraced Phylis and Harry in her arms and caressed them affectionately.

Alice approached slowly. She threw a hateful look at Marie but took no further notice of her.

"Just see these children, Mr. Lorimer. Aren't they the dears?" cried Mrs. Courtney to one of the gentlemen who had stepped up. He and his companion

courteously saluted Marie.

"Well, little fellow," said Mr. Lorimer, in jolly tones to Harry, "how do you like it here? What does a litte boy like you do all day?"

There was something in the manner of the questioner which at once won the child's heart.

Harry looked up at him with fearless, candid eyes as he answered:

"Oh, it is fine down here—much nicer than at home. In the morning Miss Desmond gives us lessons and in the afternoon we go driving. I'd like to stay here all the time—I mean if daddy was here too."

"Bravo! You are a fine fellow," remarked Mr. Lorimer smiling. "I think we shall be good friends — won't we? When I am out riding, I will come and put you in the saddle. Would you like that!"

"Oh yes, yes," cried the boy, beaming. "Daddy has often let me ride home, and it was fine. When I am well and a little older, daddy has promised to give me a pony."

"You'll be a brave rider some day," Mr. Lorimer said with a laugh, then turned to Phyllis. "And how about little sister, always so shy? Won't you give me your hand?"

But Phyllis clung to Marie.

With big, anxious eyes she gazed at her stepmother who clearly did not know just what position to assume.

"Well, Phyllis, give the gentleman your hand," she commanded shortly.

The child obeyed in fear. The company did not fail to observe that it was fear of Mrs. Gordon which impelled the child to obey.

"Oh dear," said Alice, with a forced smile, to her companions, "I have been so unfortunate with the chil-

dren. They were so terribly spoiled that I could do little with them; but my husband would hear nothing of discipline and I was helpless.

"For the sake of peace I let things go as they would. Besides, people about the children took good care to place the wicked stepmother in just the right kind of light."

Marie's face betrayed no sign of what was going on in her mind. She acted as if she had not heard, although the hateful words were directed towards her.

Mrs. Courtney seemed unable to part from the children.

"How would it be to call for the children to-morrow afternoon and make up an automobile party for them?" she proposed. "We can return early so that they can have proper rest."

"Charming," seconded Mr. Lorimer.

Alice shrugged her shoulders. She was anxious to avoid this, but had no ready reason for objecting.

Mrs. Courtney regarded her motion as consent.

"Very well, then. Have the children ready for three o'clock to-morrow afternoon, and we will come for them."

She had addressed these words in rather commanding tones to Marie, who answered quietly but firmly:

"I beg your pardon, madam, but that is impossible. Harry has not progressed sufficiently to make it safe for him to stay out after sun-down, especially here where the night air is so heavy. I am responsible to Mr. Gordon for the children and cannot permit it."

"There you are!" laughed Alice scornfully, turning to Mrs. Courtney. "You see now who is in authority at Oak Manor. Let us go, this is growing tiresome."

With a frown she turned away.

Although Mrs. Courtney was vexed at being unable to carry out her plan, she was much too sensible to blame Marie. The night air would not do the child any good.

Nevertheless, she was irritated at the idea of being compelled to submit to the will of the governess.

"Good-bye, my dears," she cried somewhat sarcastically. "It would have been nice, but we cannot do it."

"But you will have your ride," nodded Mr. Lorimer to Harry in friendly fashion as he said good-bye to him.

The gentlemen saluted Marie, although a little stiffly, while the ladies gave her no further notice.

As the party of four passed out of sight Miss Desmond breathed a sigh of relief. What was Alice doing in Miami? And how came she to be in the company of men like Lorimer and Ballard?

Both of them belonged to the Madison Country Club, known as Chicago's fastest set.

And both of them had a rather unsavory reputation where women were concerned.

Marie remembered Mrs. Courtney quite well. She had been a frequent visitor at Oak Manor. Why was her husband not with her?

These things gave her considerable food for thought. She believed Alice capable of anything. She was a woman without honor and without morals.

Obviously she had become the mistress of one of the two men.

"What a horrible state of affairs," she muttered as she took the children by the hand and returned to the cottage.

Quite naturally she was greatly annoyed at having met Alice. Her first impulse was to leave Miami at

once and go to some other place in Florida.

And she decided to write at once to Phil Gordon and tell him about her meeting with his second wife.

But after thinking it over for a while she came to the conclusion that it was an unwise thing to do.

Why irritate him still more by divulging the fact that Alice — the woman who still bore his name, had a lover.

When she arrived at the cottae she felt a sudden chill coming over her. That night she was feverish and experienced a soreness in her throat.

By morning her condition was so bad that she had to call a physician.

"You caught a severe cold, Miss Desmond," he told her after a thorough examination. "I suggest that you stay in bed for a day or two which will give me a chance to break the fever."

"I'll do anything you think best, doctor." she replied with a pained smile. "I can't afford to be ill any length of time, you know."

The prescription the physician left was filled at once in a neighborhood drugstore.

Marie began taking the medicine regularly. The fever was broken before evening, but she suffered considerably with headache.

While she was forced to stay in the house she was afraid to allow the children to go out with Annie. So long as Alice was in Miami she feared for their safety.

But she did allow them to play on the grounds which surrounded the cottage.

Almost a week passed before Marie was able to go out again. Some of her anxiety about the children had worn off. Alice nor Mrs. Courtney had come near the cottage, which led her to believe that they had left Miami.

One afternoon when she felt quite chipper, she decided to take a stroll along the beach.

Annie had little Phyllis by the hand, while Harry clung to her. Suddenly she noticed that a button was missing on the boy's coat.

"Oh, we can't go out like this, dear," she told him. "Come back in and I'll sew another button on."

"Let me do it," offered Annie. "It won't take me very long."

The governess shook her head.

"I'll take care of this, thank you," she smiled. "I'll have to go upstairs anyway, for I forgot my purse. You go ahead with Phyllis. We'll catch up with you, Annie."

The latter went out on the lawn and sat down with the little girl. Phyllis at once began to romp with the maid.

For a while they had quite a tussle on the soft grass While they were thus engaged Marie happened to look out of the window and called to them.

Annie did not hear it, but Phyllis did.

"I think Miss Desmond wants you," the little girl said.

The maid jumped up at once and turned to go back into the house.

"Stay right where you are," she cautioned Phyllis. "I'll be right out again. Whatever you do, don't run out into the street."

"I won't," promised the child.

But Annie was hardly out of sight when Phyllis forgot her promise. There was too much to attract her in the street. Handsome automobiles were rushing past with great speed.

Then she spied Harry's ball lying on the lawn. This evidently changed her original intention. For she

picked it up and tossed it into the air with shouts of glee.

One of her tosses went wild, and the ball rolled out into the street.

There was but one thought in her mind. The ball belonged to her brother and she must not lose it.

With all possible speed she ran after it. The fact that automobiles were speeding past in both directions did not seem to bother the little girl. She must retrieve that ball.

Harry would be sure to raise cain and perhaps cry if she lost it.

That instant the governess appeared in the door with Harry and Annie. She saw quickly the frightful danger to which Phyllis was exposing herself.

"Phyllis — Phyllis, stop!" she cried, trembling in every limb.

But the child either did not hear her or refused to heed the warning. She ran headlong into the middle of the street, determined to get the ball lying there.

She got the ball alright in spite of the fact that several cars whizzed by, one of them nearly striking her.

To get back to the sidewalk, was another matter, however.

Marie came running frantically.

"Phyllis!" she screamed. "Stay there. I'll come and get you!"

Before she could reach the spot, however, a new Flint sport model, driven by a woman, rushed upon the child.

Evidently the woman had lost control of the car, for she began to zigzag in an attempt not to run over Phyllis. The next moment the thing happened.

The fender caught the little girl and toppled her over.

"My God!" cried Marie, and closed her eyes.

When she opened them again, little Phyllis was lying in the middle of the street.

The fashionably gowned woman seemed too excited to realize what she had done. Like one paralyzed she remained seated in the car which came to a stop too late.

Marie reached the spot first, ahead of Annie and a number of pedestrians.

"Merciful God!" she shrieked, staring wildly at the woman in the car. "You have killed my child—my baby girl!"

The woman seemed to turn to stone. She returned Marie's stare. Neither of them was able to drag her eyes away. Marie swayed dizzily.

The woman in the car was Alice—Alice, Phillip Gordon's second wife.

Like a flash Marie realized that she had betrayed herself. What of it? She was desperate. She took the limp little form from Annie's arms and hugged it to her bosom.

"Phyllis—Phyllis, my baby girl," she wailed, the tears streaming down her face. "Look at me, darling."

Alice was still staring as if she was seeing something terrible.

One of her hands raised slowly and brushed across her eyes as if she wanted to remove something that was obstructing her vision. And then, like a devastating flash of lightning, the horrible truth rushed upon her.

This governess—this beautiful creature she hated so vindictively and so instinctively, was none other than Marie, Phil's first wife.

There was but one thought in her turbulent mind. She must get away as quickly as possible. She could not bear the sight of the hated woman who held little Phyllis

in her arms.

She put the gear in reverse, backed away, then gave the steering gear a twist. A moment later the car shot forward and disappeared around the next corner.

But Alice was taunted by a thousand horrible thoughts. What would be the end of this? Sooner or later Phil must discover the truth.

"No—no!" she panted "It must not be. I'll prevent that, no matter what the cost. I'll kill that woman first!"

## Chapter 237

## WALTER WAYNE

FTER her verbal scrimmage with Mr. Shields, the old lawyer, Mrs. Crawford lost no time in complying with his request. She had sense enough to know when she was beaten. Although it was a bitter pill for her to swallow, she left the old Crawford mansion with all its comforts and luxuries without a murmur of protest.

But she took precious good care that the reason for her sudden leaving remained hidden from the world.

With the check for five thousand dollars in her purse, Mrs. Crawford disappeared one night, and turned up the following morning in Chicago as Mrs. Marian Prescott.

She rented a small apartment in a nice neighborhood on the Northside and coolly prepared to map out her plan for the future.

In her present surroundings she felt quite sure that there was no danger of again meeting any of the people who had known her as Mrs. Crawford.

She was not fool enough to further waste her energy in hating. Nor was she any longer jealous. Lillian and Victor Talbot had ceased to exist so far as she was concerned.

Walter Wayne was the only man who received a serious thought. And he was also the only man who knew where she had taken up her abode.

Marian Prescott was anxious to retain the friendship of this man, for within it lay great possibilities.

Marriage between them was not entirely out of the question. And as Mrs. Walter Wayne she saw a chance to laugh at those who now sneered at her.

But that was thinking too far ahead Mrs. Prescott gave every effort to making her apartment as cozy and inviting as she could afford.

She figured that the sum of five thousand dollars would keep the wolf from the door at least until something turned up.

As a young girl she had been somewhat of an artist with the brush. And some of her drawings had been considered by publishers of magazines.

By the time Walter Wayne paid her the first visit in her new home, she had no reason to feel ashamed. She had a colored maid and all the comforts only a woman of some wealth could afford.

"What a cozy nest," he declared as he looked around approvingly.

"I am glad you like it," she smiled, taking his hand and petting it. "I expect to stay here during the winter."

"Are you coming out to the country home again next spring?" he inquired.

"No," she said, shaking her pretty head. "Perhaps you are not aware of the fact that I left the old Crawford country house for good. Please, sit down, and I'll tell you all about it."

Walter Wayne, who like all the neighbors, was ignorant of the facts connected with the woman's sudden leaving.

The story he listened to was rather at variance with the truth, although it sounded logical enough. As she neared the finish she burst into tears.

"It is a shame to deprive me of what really belonged to me," she sobbed. "Mr. Crawford in that utter-

ly unfair will left everything to his daughter Lillian. All I got was a paltry five thousand dollars."

Wayne made no comment for a long moment. Occasionally he glanced at the woman whose tear-streaked face was partly covered by her hands.

From the bottom of his heart he pitied her. He loved Marian, although he had not yet made it known to her.

"Don't feel too badly about it, dear Mrs. Crawford," he murmured sympathetically. "I assure you that——"

"You must not call me that any longer," she interrupted, drying her tears. "I have gone back to my old name of Mrs. Prescott. But I would much rather have you call me just plain Marian."

He took the explanation with a good-natured grin. It did not seem strange to him that it indicated a former marriage.

And what difference did it make? Marian was still a very beautiful woman. She had more life and vivacity than most girls have at twenty.

"I shall be glad to call you by your Christian name" he declared. "I like Marian."

"Do you?" Her smile was provocative—inviting.

After a moment of though he gave the conversation a sudden twist by saying:

"I don't know as you have much to regret, Marian. Life out in the country is monotonous. Here in the city you can enjoy all the good shows and concerts. I have missed them terribly since I took a hold of the estate.

"More than once I have been on the verge of selling out and put the money into some business in the city. I believe I could make a success of it, and I am almost persuaded to try it."

Marian Prescott's eyes beamed. The suggestion offered much. Nothing could have suited her better than see Walter Wayne located in Chicago.

"Why don't you?" she cried. "You are not cut out for a farmer. Chicago offers more opportunities to a wide-awake man than any other city in the United States. I am sure you'll make good no matter what you try."

Wayne was pleased at the confidence she seemed to have in him.

While he sat in silent thoughtfulness Mrs. Prescott's brain was busy conceiving a more convincing argument.

She had the persuasive powers and the tact to do it. Not for a moment did she let him suspect that an ulterior motive lurked behind it.

By the time he left Marian's cozy apartment, his mind was fully made up. Walter Wayne was decidedly a man of action.

In a week the country estate was sold through one of the real estate agencies, and he came to the city to live.

The problem of some new occupation Marian Prescott helped him to solve. She had a wise head and she was more experienced.

She persuaded Wayne to invest his money in a finance company with the most gratifying results.

"You are a brick," he told her one evening a week later. "I believe I have made a ten-strike. And it was you who advised it."

Marian lowered her head and blushed prettily.

"I am happy to know that your venture promises to be a success," she murmured.

Then followed three weeks of ardent courtship. Walter Wayne saw in Marian Prescott an ideal woman.

And finally he came to the conclusion that he could not live without her.

So far as he knew there was no good reason why he should not make her his wife.

Of course, there were those who seemed inclined to say nasty things about her. Scandal mongers and well-meaning friends warned him, but he brushed that aside.

A beautiful woman who had to make her own living was always talked about more or less.

What mattered it if she was thirty-eight and he was only twenty-six? Age makes no difference in a love like his.

So the day came when Walter Wayne decided to ask Mrs. Prescott to name the happy day. Dressed fastidiously, he drove to her apartment and was admitted by the colored maid.

"Is Mrs. Prescott in?" he asked a trifle uncertain.

"Yes, sir," the maid replied. "Wait a moment, please."

A moment later he heard Mrs. Prescott's voice.

"Come in here, Walter," she said.

He turned at a right angle from the narrow hall into a neat drawing room which by its ease and quiet beauty seemed to have withdrawn itself from the outside environment by the charm of her personality.

The creamy walls, nicely spaced by modest landscapes, the peacock blue rug, well-modelled furniture and ivory tinted woodwork, suggested the comfort of a person of means and taste.

Walter Wayne, who knew how Marian Prescott's delicate body had slaved with the paint brush to redeem this room from its original unloveliness, had a moment of pause at the door.

He began to reflect how the decorations, the very

chairs themselves, had come here out of something mysteriously better, like their owner, bringing with them an air of sweetness and pride.

She did not see him at first, so quiet was his entrance, and it was a moment before he observed her figure, silhouetted against the soft light as she sat stitching busily at a garment which lay across her knees.

So gracious and pliant was her form as she drooped toward the flying needle, so feminine and reflective the poise of her beautiful head with its curving throat, straight tragic nose, that he hesitated at disturbing a thing so finely satisfying.

"Why, Walter, I didn't know you were coming," she began, and reached out her slender hand.

"I hope I am not disturbing you," he said, seating himself awkwardly. "But I have some good news. I thought I just had to come and tell you about it."

"Ah, I am so glad," she responded, and folded her hands across her sewing as she looked into his face.

"It is just a sort of sentimental victory," he smiled. "You remember I told you about a man to whom I had entrusted a part of my money. He is a stock broker and he gave me a valuable tip. Well I trusted him because I——"

"Because you believed in his honor and ability," Mrs. Prescott supplied, nodding eagerly.

"Well, he made good sooner than I expected, Marian. Today he showed me the results. I am twice as rich as I used to be. There will never be any more financial worries."

She was regarding him very seriously and there was a trace of sadness in her voice as she said:

"What if he had failed, Walter?"

He shook his head.

"He never could have failed in my estimation," he declared. "If he had happened to lose out in this instance, it couldn't have made a difference in my view of his character, because, you see, I know the man. He is always successful."

"And you can trust him like that?" she smiled.

"Yes. Why not? I haven't lost faith in all human kind," he said. "There are still a few men who are true and honorable. You have to pick them out."

A space of silence followed.

"Marian, put down the sewing for a while."

He had risen and laid a strong hand gently on her arm.

"You see," he added, "I didn't come here to brag about my luck. I want to talk about something else You and——"

"You must remember what I told you yesterday," she broke in, looking steadily at the spot where her sewing had lain, although it had slipped unheeded on the floor.

"It can't be that way," he persisted, leaning over her. "I love you so, dear. I need you and you need me."

"Ah, Walter, dear boy," she looked up and put out her hand, touching the sleeve of his coat tenderly for an instant. "I am very sorry, but it must not be. You must not speak to me about marriage again."

His face paled.

"Tell me, is there someone else?" he demanded.

Her shake of the head denied it.

"No, Walter, there is no one in my life now."

"Perhaps I am with you too much," he suggested stubbornly. "Perhaps I bore you, bother you with my persistence. Is that so, Marian?"

"That is what I most adore in you," she said.

She glanced up at him shyly, then looked away as though frightened at the impulsive slip of her reserve

"Then you do love me, don't you, Marian?"

"Yes, I love you very much. How could I help it." She motioned him to a chair. "Sit down here beside me and let us try to understand each other about—about this Now I want you to tell me first of all what you see in me."

Walter Wayne uttered a soft laugh.

"It is the normal, human thing to be attracted by beauty," he explained slowly. "I'll put that first candidly because I think you are the most lovely thing that has ever touched my worthless life.

"And then there is that appeal that seems to come to me always from your sensitive little hands that call to me for the best protection a man can give."

She glanced at him.

"Protection?" she asked sowewhat puzzled. "Why I can take care of myself."

"Yes, protection, Marian. And you need it more than some women I know. There has been a great deal of talking. I want the right to put a stop to it. I want every man who dares to mention your name to answer to me."

Mrs. Prescott flushed slightly.

"Then you know that I am talked about, Walter?" softly.

"Well, yes. Perhaps I should not have mentioned it, dear."

"Oh, I don't mind," she sighed. "You have gotten used to it by this time. And you know, I sometimes wonder why you keep on coming having heard so many discreditable things said about me."

He looked her squarely in the eyes.

"Marian, I have one thing other men lack perhaps.

and that is faith. I have always made it a practice to look for virtues rather than for flaws. You have many virtues which I learned to admire in you. But love is the greatest of all—and faith."

"Faith," the woman whispered, as she reached for his hand and drew it to her lips. "Other men ask questions, they want to know my past from the day I was born. And you are willing to take me for your wife without question."

"Yes," Wayne said eagerly. "And what questions should I ask beyond what I already know?"

"Do you know that I have a child?" she queried, watching him, "a boy of sixteen?"

"Oh!" For the first time he betrayed a note of surprise.

"And you don't know my age, Walter. I am thirty-five. I was married when I was quite a young girl."

"Yes, Marian."

"Of course, you knew that I am a divorced woman," she went on, her voice now sharp and cold. "My husband brought the suit. I did not even appear to defend myself because I know how utterly useless it would have been."

"All this means nothing to me, dear," he smiled and patted her hand. "Tell me about your boy."

"They took him away," her eyes filled with tears and she stroked them passionately from her lashes. "They took him from me—his mother—the only one on earth who understood him—and they gave him to my husband. Ah, how cruel they were, how cruel."

Mrs. Prescott burst wildly into weeping and buried her head in her arms.

Wayne wanted to take and soothe her grief away, but there was something in that same grief which

seemed to restrain him as the presence of an invisible being that stood between them.

"That is my case," she cried, her head still buried, her voice breaking. "And now what will you ask?"

"I will ask nothing, darling," he assured her. "It was noble and kind of you to tell me all this, but those are concerns of your life which are not mine to meddle with, unless I can help.

"Now don't think for a moment that you have altered anything by what you said. I know—I feel that you never did a deliberate wrong in your life."

She removed her arms from her face and stole a long glance at him. He was the only man who ever had said a thing like that to her. And she made up her mind that instant to play fair with him.

"Thank you for that, Walter," she said, thrusting her hand in his for an instant. "But it is impossible to let it go that way."

"But there is nothing else to be said," he persisted. "We love each other and nothing else matters. You must promise to marry me now and give me the assurance that you go through with it. Will you, Marian, dear?"

"You've got to know more," she evaded. "You must know everything what is being said about me, then weigh it and see what truths you can extract from it in your own mind. Do you think your love alone is sufficient to overcome everything?"

"I have faith, absolute faith in you, dear. You know——"

"You must do what I said before, and do it at once," the woman broke in. "There is one person who can talk to you frankly about the evidence, about the evidence, about the story about my secret divorce. You must go to him and ask him what he knows."

"Of course, I'll go if you really wish it," Wayne agreed. "But do you suppose he will talk to a stranger like me?"

"I'll send a note with you," Mrs. Prescott replied as she rose and crossed to her desk.

She seated herself and began to write. The soft purring of the pen across the white paper marked the rapidity with which she composed.

She folded the sheet nervously, put it into an envelope, addressed it, and handed the message to her lover.

Wayne glanced at it.

"Herbert Prescott," he read half aloud.

"Yes, that is the name of my former husband," she replied to his look of inquiry.

"Shall I come back to you after having seen him?" he asked, as he reached for his hat. "I am sure you don't expect that he can change my mind about you, Marian, really, it is a waste of time."

"Hear his story first, then use your own best judgment," the woman told him.

She held out her hand, her face pitifully white and worn.

"Good-by, Walter," she said, swallowing hard.

"No, it is not good-by, dearest!" he cried "I'll be back soon."

He made an attempt to take her in his arms, but she evaded him by swiftly running to the other side of the table.

"Be a good boy now," she smiled wistfully.

For a moment he stood where he was contemplating, then hastened from the room.

Marion felt strangely lonely when he had gone. What if he would not return? The very thought frightened her.

Walter Wayne was her last chance. If she lost him she might just as well abandon the hope of ever marrying a man of his type and character.

"Oh, he will come back!" she murmured as she clasped her hands in a desperate motion. "He must come back!"

She loved him after a fashion, that was true. She loved him as much as she could love any other man. But the strange part of it was that she desired to play fair with him. For others had not been thus favored.

**Continued in next number**

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